

The Impacts of Multi-environmental Constructs on Tourism Destination Competitiveness: Local Residents' Perceptions

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Abstract

In the rural tourism industry, the environment has emerged to be of most concern to the local communities, followed by social-cultural and economic issues. Stemming from the awareness, the environment has become one of the main pillars for sustainable tourism development, particularly, rural tourism destination. On the other note, in a competitive tourism market, it is important for rural tourism destinations to create competitive advantage in order to attract visitors. Therefore, competitiveness theory underpins the research framework proposed and attempts to examine the impacts of multi-environmental constructs towards the development of rural tourism destination competitiveness. A total of 278 respondents comprising of local communities from rural destinations in Sarawak, Malaysia took part voluntarily in this study. To assess the developed model, *SmartPLS 2.0 (M3)* is applied based on path modelling and bootstrapping. The findings showed that local residents are in their believed that for a rural tourism destination to enhance its competitiveness, environmental education is the key to increase environmental conservation that lead to better quality of environment. Tourism infrastructure is an added advantage to increase a tourism destination competitiveness. This study further discussed on the implications of the findings, limitations, and direction for future research.

Keywords: rural tourism, environmental components, destination competitiveness, local residents' perceptions, Sarawak, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Tourism industry is said to be always related to economic contribution. It is either tourism contributes in a larger scale such as country's economic growth or in a smaller scale likes contribute to local communities' welfare and increased their standard of living (Rahmani, Hajari, Karimian, & Hajilo, 2013). Past research has highlighted the positive impact of the tourism industry, and its contribution to economic and social development of local communities (Egbali, Nosrat, & Ali-pour, 2011; Moshabaki & Malek, 2004; Sirakaya, Jamal, & Choi, 2001). Nonetheless, tourism also brings negative outcomes to rural communities, such as crowding, destruction of the natural resources and environment, and increased cost of living (Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2009; Loumou, Giourga, Dimitrakopoulos, & Koukoulas, 2000; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999). Thus, this has led to the evolved of sustainable tourism, a proper development of tourism industry that benefited the tourism stakeholders as well as conserving the environment for sustainable use in the future.

The country, Malaysia, famous with its cultural heritage and natural environments has successfully brought in millions of international tourists over the decades. These resources are confirmed as the significant factors for the development of rural tourism. However, Harrill (2004) highlighted that it's important to involve local communities in preserving these resources because of the fact that the communities are the one staying at the rural touristic locations. Rural communities typically derive their livelihood from their local environment, so it is crucial to take their perspective of rural tourism development into perspective. It is important to overcome community concerns and to gain their support for sustainable rural tourism development. Important concerns in generating community support for rural tourism development focus on improvements to the standard of living and quality of life of the local communities. This study is able to identify destination competitiveness with the help of local communities and indirectly improve their standard of living through the creation of job opportunities without destroying the natural environment.